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ABSTRACT

Teachers should foster in children's writing the use of words with "sparkle" and "spin"--"sparkle" implying brightness and vitality, "spin" connoting industry, patience, and painstaking work. By providing creative listening experiences with good children's or adult literature, the teacher can encourage students to broaden their imaginations and utilize unusual words to describe feelings, characters, and moods. Some of the many possible works which have been found helpful in instilling literature appreciation and promoting creative writing skills are "Charlotte's Web," "Hailstones and Halibut Bones," "A Child's Christmas in Wales," and "Island of the Blue Dolphins." (Other pieces of literature for the elementary classroom, as well as samples of children's written work, are included.) (MF)

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Sparkling and Spinning Words

In 1957 Anne and Paul Rand published their colorful book, *Sparkle and Spin* (11) which spoke of some words being gay and bright "like tinsel and silver," and others which lurked along "just as dark as night" (11). This attractive book offers a theme for a discussion about creative writing because our words should have both "sparkle and spin." The word, *sparkle,* connotes brightness, vitality, life, beauty, and shiny flashes or gleams. The word, *spin,* as defined by Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary* means "to stir into activity, especially into intense, sustained, and integrated activity, often with zeal, spurring, or inspiring." Certainly, we as teachers should strive to spark pupils to create more colorful language products.

To *spin* also has a somewhat different connotation, including a recognition of skill and persistence. When I think of the word, *spin,* two images come to mind. First, I visualize Arachne with her nimble fingers weaving her fabled stories of the gods and goddesses into gossamer webs sparkling with dew drops and diamonds. Then again, spinning invokes a picture of the little spider heroine in *Charlotte's Web* (18). She befriended Wilbur, a humble pig, and saved his life through her miraculously spun words woven into her web. Children love Charlotte and Wilbur and some third-grade pupils in the San Leandro City Schools taught by Rosalie Mahakian wrote original letters which were imaginative and charming to both Wilbur and Charlotte. For example, Skipper wrote two letters, one to Wilbur and the other one to his spider heroine.

Spider Town, Penn.
Zuckerman's Pig Pen
February 8, 1963

Dear Wilbur:

You have done a great job. You have saved my baby egg sack. You will have a few friends every spring. You are my life, Wilbur, you have saved another one of my lives and that is my egg sack. You are the best of me, the very best. I wonder if you like me so I do not have to worry about that because I know you like me. I have saved your life, and you have saved my life too.

With Love,
Charlotte

And the other one by Skipper is more brief.

Zuckerman's Pig Pen
Pig Town, Ohio
January 9, 1963.

Dear Charlotte:

I am writing a letter to you for writing "Terrific" on your web and writing some pig on it too. I hope Furn comes to see us.

Your friend,
Wilbur

So the spinning skill of a spider connotes industry, patience, painstaking work, and at times a form produced by a slow process with protracted labor. It is true that creative language has sparkle, but it is also possible that such sparkling splendor does not erupt suddenly in all cases, for at times it is the afterglow of painstaking, skill building labor. In these words, "sparkle and spin," one visualizes both the laborious skill and effervescent power of the creative process, for creativity is not only a scintillating spark, but also it is an intense, sustained, and integrated activity. To illustrate the "sparkle and spin" of the creative process, I shall consider literature

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and its relationship to building our word reservoirs.

Pupils can utilize imaginative content existing in their minds to produce original products. However, the minds of children must be nourished with good literature which has style, rhythm, beauty, imagination, and brilliant silvery words. Long ago, Mabel Rice spoke of balancing impressions with expressions, and the source of the greatest amount of impressions is literature. Literature may be read privately or "auded," but later, impressions from such literature burst forth in unexpected expression.

Not all auding experiences consist of listening to children's classics. At times, the mind of the child can appreciate the beauty of phrases in adult poetry or prose. Sometimes such poetry is too sophisticated for the child to read alone, but selected portions can be shared through listening experiences. For example, consider *Éloges and Other Poems* by St.-John Perse (14). This little volume was not designed for childhood, but teachers can help pupils extract bits of color from these lines, and children can be urged to keep colorful word books utilizing attractive phrases or sentences. Consider such descriptions as tropical moons of rose and green which hung like mangoes (14:21); or, the flight of wasps which were like "bites of sunlight on the back of the sea" (14:41). Such are the tunes sung by St.-John Perse and children can learn to listen to this music.

The child can also "aud" the words of Juan Ramón Jiménez (4) and instinctively feel the simplicity and rhythm of his scarlet holocausts and golden acacias in "Nocturne" (4:4), or scenes where blue skies are ornamented with pomegranates (4:10). Again, there are "green goldfinches" (4:20). There is a symphony of black and white in "The Dead Girl" (4:37); but when this poet speaks of little Platero, his donkey, trudging along to his quiet pool of "carmine, rose, and violet waters" (4:57), the child can easily see reflected images of Platero in the mirrored pool. Certainly, the child can listen to the tunes sung by Jiménez, and the words of the child may some day be more colorful, and a future sonnet may lie dormant or burst forth at an unexpected time.

A modern poetry book for children which utilizes color in verse form is *Hailstones and Halibut Bones,* Adventures in Color, by Mary O'Neill (6). For example, under such titles as "What Is Green?" "What Is Yellow?" or "What Is White?" the poet has offered imaginative scenes of cool, woodsy greenness of moss and trees, golden canaries and nodding daffodils, or the alabaster purity of the valley lily and the cooing, peaceful dove (6). This book has marvelous uses for young authors. Children can learn a color a day or specialize in a color a week. The color can be introduced and featured through the use of the particular poem about the color, or pupils can interview painters, formica, or car salesmen to get color charts for painted walls, plastic covers, or original names for fashionable exteriors and interiors of new automobiles. Experience charts can be written. Each child may offer his own particular interpretation. Each day or each week each individual child could insert his personal line and idea about a color under such titles as: "What Is Pink?" "What Is Gray?" or "What Is Blue?" By inserting a line or two, here and there, the class may develop a colorful class poem, or individual children can contribute personal poems. For example, Jerry wrote:

What Is Yellow?

Yellow is straw
So stiff, so straight
Yellow is mustard
In small orange trees;

Yellow is a rose
Yellow is Jersey cream
So rich and good
Or the rays of the setting sun
Before breezes
At night.

Occasionally, a teacher may wish to develop a sense of simile through the use of colors and the words *like* and *as* or *is similar to*. For example:

My red sweater
Is as bright as a
Blackbird's wing.

Another new book which has promising opportunities for creative thinking and writing is *The Sun Is a Golden Earring* by Natalie Belting (2). This is a philosophical collection of verse, a compilation of beauty and wisdom from various countries of the world. Children could illustrate thoughts, locate sources of verses on a colorful world map, or use some of the words for metaphorical thinking. An excerpt from the book demonstrates Hungarian peasants visualizing the moon as a white cat hunting silvery mice at night; or again, in Hawaii the natives speak of the silver necklace of stars dangling from the tropical heavens. As the teacher and children make a listing of astronomical terminology such as the sun, the moon, and the milky way, pupils can be urged to create their own original metaphors and illustrate them similar to the illustrations developed by Bernard Bryson. Incidentally, this book was a "runner up" for the Caldecott award.

A small book which has been extraordinarily popular with both children and adults is *Happiness Is a Warm Puppy* by Charles Schultz (12). The June 29, 1962, issue of the *Saturday Review* indicated that almost half a million copies have already been sold by Determined Publications, and Schultz now has a new booklet off the press, *Security Is a Thumb and a Blanket*, which should be just as popular. Children in the San Francisco Bay area recently contributed happiness ideas to a local radio station and received prizes. Susan Lewis utilized the *Happiness* book with boys and girls in her second grade class and some of the children supplied the following lines.

Happiness is when you have a swimming pool
Happiness is eating ham
Happiness is the American flag
Happiness is having enough sleep
Happiness is minding my teacher
Happiness is a Sunday afternoon when we go hiking
Happiness is when I sleep with my aunt's dog and my aunt throws the cat on the bed and that's how she gets me up
Happiness is when I love other people
Happiness is my eyes
Happiness is to run and jump and hop
Happiness is eating lemon pie
Happiness is this earth.

In another primary-grade class, pupils listened to the *Happiness* book. Later, a girl wrote and illustrated a complete little book titled *Sadness*.

A rhythmic beauty permeates good prose. Attuning the child's ear to beautiful rhythms will enhance expression in composition writing. First of all, let the young child immerse himself in the books by Beatrix Potter, not only *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (7), but also such little stories as *The Tailor of Gloucester* (8), *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin* (9), and *The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse* (10). Do you remember Mrs. Tittlemouse who lived in a bank under a hedge? She was a tidy little mouse, "always sweeping and dusting the soft sandy floors," and sometimes she resented the dirty feet of an unfortunate beetle as she "clattered her dust pan" (10). Here the child can meet fat old Mr. Jackson who never wiped his feet and blew thistledown all over the room with his "Tiddly, widdly, widdly!" and a "Pouff, pouff, puff!" (10:37).

Think of the simplicity and beauty in the words by Beatrix Potter in *The Tale of*

Squirrel Nutkin (9), for in this tale she spoke of Nutkin and Twinkelbury and all the other little squirrels scampering from the woods to the shores of the lake. Visualize the squirrels who constructed miniature rafts of twigs and utilized their bushy tails for sails as they paddled away to Owl Island in quest of nuts and berries. As opposed to this simplicity, one reads *The Tailor of Gloucester,* a Christmas story. Here the child meets the little tailor who began to make his "cherry-coloured corded coat silk embroidered with pansies and roses" (8). What child could kill the little mice after listening to the "snippeting of scissors, and the snappeting of thread," and hearing their little tune sung for the merchants of London! These tales of rabbits and squirrels, mice and kittens, and piglings and hedgehogs, are written in tiny little books for wee little folk, but their beautiful vocabulary and rhythm linger in the child's imaginative ear to be sung again at a future hour.

Another more recent book about the forest people is *King Oberon's Forest* by Hilda Van Stockum (17). Here one meets the three dwarfs: Brothers Botolph, Alban, and Ubald in the forest of the king. At the bewitched time of trick or treats, the brothers found a little something that moved and cried "rolled up in a cabbage leaf like a small sausage" (17:27). This was a little fairy sprite who became the child of the forest folk. Here also, the reader scans columns of the *Forest Gazette* which were bristling with the names of Miss Jennie Nightingale from Palm Beach and Mrs. Woodlark nee Meadowlark who was stylish in her new French bonnet with purple strings (17:50). What a time the dwarfs had keeping Felix home! For this little child of the woods enjoyed the baby leaves of the beech tree with their silvery halos and floods of bluebells on the forest turf (17:52). Material is offered here to permit an expansion of imaginative power. After reading a few excerpts from the *Forest Gazette,* encourage the children to compose a Forest Periodical of their own. The style of a newspaper society page could be followed, but the news events should be fashioned for a reading public of rabbits, woodchucks, meadowlarks, and squirrels. Or again, many children may create a fairy prince in art or drama, and the three little dwarfs should provide content for numerous humorous dialogues to be created by the children in the future. A similar book is *The Cricket in Times Square* by George Selden (13). Children need time to stretch their imaginations, and imagination's kingdom need not always be in the realm of the astronauts.

A beautiful rhythmic style also appears in *A Child's Christmas in Wales* by Dylan Thomas (15, 16). An interesting lesson using the Caedmon recording of this seasonal classic was developed by Mrs. Susan de Celle with a fifth-grade class in the Marshall School of Castro Valley, California. First, the pupils were directed to listen to sequences of the story as heard on the record. The following phrases were written on the chalkboard:

1. Christmas Eve—a fire at Mrs. Prothero's home
2. The snowfall on Christmas Eve
3. Christmas morning—the presents received
4. Christmas visitors, aunts and uncles
5. Christmas dinner
6. Christmas afternoon with friends
7. Carol singing on Christmas evening
8. Christmas night.

Children were asked to remove everything from the tops of their desks, to open wide their imaginative power, and to listen carefully. The words, "Dylan Thomas" were written on the chalkboard, and a brief discussion was given. A boy located Wales on a map. Mrs. de Celle described Dylan

Thomas and his image of himself as he grew older. She told about the time when he looked at himself in a mirror and said: "I was so beautiful when I was a spit of a lad, and now I look like a pig." Then the teacher told the class that the recording was made by the poet before he died in 1955. The story of the record in an unimaginative style was written on the board in a condensed version:

> It snowed on Christmas Eve. Jim and I chased cats and there was a fire at a neighbor's house. On Christmas morning I got up early and I got lots of presents. I got a duck and a coloring book and some tin soldiers, and a whistle and a muffler. My aunts and uncles came over on Christmas day and we had turkey for dinner. In the afternoon I played with my friends and that night we sang Christmas carols. Then I went to bed, and that's my story about Christmas.

The teacher pointed out that this was principally the story by Dylan Thomas, and this was the way he could have written it. However, the poet created a work of art through his use of descriptive words. Pupils were asked to visualize what Thomas did with such a simple theme. The class listened intently, although some parts of the record were difficult to understand from the standpoint of the Welsh dialect of the poet. However, the children's attention was regained by such a sentence as "I built a snowman and my brother knocked it down, and I knocked my brother down, and then we had tea."

After listening to the words, the pupils sat quietly. Then they discussed descriptions and how these word pictures made the story more vivid. One child suggested that when Thomas described the snow, "I felt cold." Boys and girls held a discussion of particular phrases, and the record was replayed so pupils could select their favorite passages. Some of these which particularly intrigued this group of children were:

> White as Lapland
> Horrible-whiskered cats
> Damp front farmhouse parlors
> Cats in their fur-abouts
> Small dry, eggshell voice. (15 and 16)

Paper was passed out, and these fifth-grade pupils were asked to write stories or poems, but the purpose was to make creative products more colorful and interesting by using unusual words to describe their feelings, their characters, or their moods. Many professional writers keep Impression Notebooks or booklets with words, phrases, or sentences jotted down. Frequently, these notes are reviewed until style and phrasing becomes a part of the author.

One child in this fifth-grade class, Raylene Howe, wrote the following imaginative poem as a result of the lesson on the style of Dylan Thomas.

Tree

> Long scrawny arms
> On a dark winter morning
> Light green fringe
> On a soft spring day.
> Great green fans
> In summer when I play
> Turn into flames
> Giving me a warning
> That soon there will be
> Long scrawny arms.

In order to portray the gamut of a creative writing lesson motivated through literature such as the Dylan Thomas verse, I shall quote one other product, a story by Mike.

My Mimi Mouse

> Mimi was a mouse, so they called her Mimi Mouse, naturally, and she liked cheese, like any mouse, naturally. One day, she tried to steal some cheese, naturally, but there was a cat named Barbara that tried to eat her, naturally!
>
> Barbara looked like a vicious tiger, with long, curly whiskers that looked like they needed a shave, with monstruous teeth and two fangs hanging out of her mouth. It was just too much for Mimi, and she

fainted, naturally. But when Barbara touched Mimi and felt the slimy, little ugly, hairy, big-eared little monster, she also fainted, naturally!

After experiencing this lesson, these pupils also listened to Japanese haiku verse and composed modified haiku verses of their own. Later, Robert Ullrich wrote:

On The Beach

In the sun
The beach so bright
Gleams with yellow light.

When nightfall breaks
The waves like snakes
Wiggle and squiggle
on the shore.

This was not the true pattern of 5, 7, 5 syllables which is usually seen in translations of haiku verses into English. However, the boy created his lines after experimenting with the typical haiku pattern, which is a 17-syllable form of three lines.

Children do creative listening to receive the rhythm and beauty of individual words, but they also have auding experiences in appreciating the individual style of an author's writing. Nancy Lewis utilized two books, *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (5) and *Mr. Popper's Penguins* (1) to develop this impression of style with her fifth-grade pupils. *Island of the Blue Dolphins* is principally the story of a female Robinson Crusoe, an Indian maiden, Karana, who lived alone on an island without even her man, Friday. In lonely desperation she finally tamed a wild dog for a companion. The teacher read the author's introduction of Ramo to the children and asked them to note mentally which words and phrases made Ramo known as a person. Then each child wrote a character description using succinct phrases:

Bob was about thirty years old. He stood six feet four inches tall and weighed 240 pounds. His hair was black and curly. He had a scratch above his left eye which he got from falling off a horse and hitting his head against a barb wire fence. He seems to always look down as if something were worrying him.

. . . . . .

She is small in height, but big in thought.

. . . . . .

When she sat in the car, you could see her blond hair, more bright than the sun, and her blue eyes like the huge blue sky. Sandy was like a beautiful peacock dazzling in the morning sun.

Then the teacher read more of the *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (5) to her pupils and read the selection where Kimki, the new chief, was to sail off in quest of a new land for his people. The teacher posed these questions at the end of the chapter:

Would Kimki ever reach this far country about which nothing is known?
Would he come back before the winter was over? Or never? (5:29)

These questions fired the imaginations of these fifth-grade children. Some had Kimki lost at sea, eaten by sharks. Others chose to have him roam an island with water and food. Here is one child's story:

Kimki has very little food in his canoe. He has two more boxes of supplies. Kimki thinks he won't make it. He's getting close to an island. The island is called "Barren Island." The name, Barren was a good one. On this island he finds a footprint. This footprint is mysterious because it has a sea shell in the middle. There are more prints. Kimki is following them. The prints lead into a cave! The cave is very dark! Kimki begins to hear footsteps. He runs out of the cave. Kimki finds more food and sails away. He makes it back to his island safe and sound.

After the teacher and children had settled the fate of Kimki, the group moved on to the Black Cave—that mysterious dark cave into which Karana paddled and was caught by the tide. She had to remain in the gloomy interior all night, but she was not entirely alone. A row of strange figures

stood on one side of the room. Imaginatively, the pupils of the class spent the long night with Karana wondering about these strange figures in the cave. What circumstances surrounded their being placed there? Listen to a child's writing:

> It is morning. I went to look over the skeleton. At my touch, he rose.
>
> "I represent Kimki, and the figures--villagers," he said.
>
> I was too stunned to speak. At last I said, "But you are dead!"
>
> "It was many years ago when I was swept here. I made straw figures of the villagers. In them are their souls. They obey me." He then clapped his hands. They danced and sang as he played his flute. At last they stopped. "You shall never leave until you promise to never tell about us."
>
> I promised and left. When I left, I told myself it couldn't be. As I looked back, the cave had vanished. I tried to keep my eyes from creeping to the frightening figures. I crouched down in the boat and tried to sleep, but I could not.

Almost every pupil in this class read the *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (5) and most of them grasped the style of the author.

Children in this same fifth-grade class also read *Mr. Popper's Penguins* (1) which is a humorous story. The penguins got Mr. Popper into many kinds of predicaments, but this class particularly enjoyed chapter 14, "Mr. Greenbaum." They read this chapter and added conversational bits and more action as follows:

> On Saturday, the twenty-ninth of January —"the Popper family and their twelve trained penguins, two of them carrying flags in their beaks, left the house to find the Palace Theater." (1:85)
>
> So they climbed on a bus. In order to keep the cool atmosphere to which a penguin is accustomed, Mr. Popper suggested that all the windows on the bus be opened. Pupils placed themselves imaginatively on the bus as one of the passengers and wrote the following dialogue.
>
> "Colder than this!" said Mrs. Williams, one of the passengers on the bus. "It's cold enough as it is."
>
> "Sorry, said Mr. Popper, "But Antarctic penguins need it very cold." Mr. Popper went around the whole bus and opened up all the windows.
>
> "Just for that," said the bus driver, "it will cost you another fifty cents."
>
> "All right," said Mr. Popper, "but the windows will have to stay open for the rest of the trip."
>
> "Then I guess you will have to give me another fifty cents," said the driver.
>
> "Here you are," said Mr. Popper.
>
> The bus driver smiled and said, "In a way, it's pretty funny to have you on my bus because so far I've got $1.50 from you, when I usually get only ten cents from the other passengers."

Conversation and dialogue skills are difficult for young children. However, pupils in this fifth-grade class succeeded in capturing a natural conversational quality through carefully reading and listening to Mr. Popper stories.

Space will not permit a description of all of the elements involved in the spinning of creative products. However, if teachers wish to improve the qualitative factors of writing, they need to recognize the significance of exact usage. The teacher will understand words more if she reads "The Words of Poetry" in *How Does a Poem Mean?* by Ciardi (3).

Learning to use sparkling and spinning words involves an auding or creative listening to good literature. The child listens to the beautiful and descriptive words and phrases of prose and poetry. He becomes alerted to the original, the different, the unexpected quality of expression as contrasted with trite stereotyped clichés and hackneyed phrases. He grows cognizant of the "crackling in carmine chasms," (14) and the "metallic splendour of purple waters" (14). Also, the child listens to the beautiful rhythm of words in their interrelatedness to each other. For example, Mario in *The Cricket in Times Square* (13)

was listening, straining to catch the mysterious sound like the plucking strings of a violin and harp or the vibrato of falling leaves rustling in green forest thickets far from the sounds of the city. The child listens to the individual style of an author's prose, and occasionally he imitates the style through his own original writing. He uses the dictionary, glossary, and *Thesaurus* and he gathers words as a connoisseur collects early American glass. Then some day, like a butterfly from its cocoon, words emerge which sparkle and spin in glimmering glory.

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